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THESES OF A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Film Censorship in Hungary in the Horthy Era

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I. Theme of the research

The aim of the dissertation is to describe and analyse the workings of the film censorship in the Horthy era. To accomplish this aim the text first outlines the theoretical and historical framework that serves as a starting point of this endeavour, then it describes in detail the political-social context in which the institutional network of film and film censorship can be placed, and finally the different aspects of the motion picture control will be discussed. The research presents results that contribute, among others, to the history of film, publicity, mentality, institutional network or politics after 1919.

In the past decades serious changes have been observed in the research of censorship which are connected to the works of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Althusser or Judith Butler that renewed the viewpoints of examination of the problem. This paradigm shift is marked in the historiography as the appearance *New Censorship Theory*, which has had a considerable impact on the present thesis, especially the thoughts of Michel Foucault. The research aims to describe the Hungarian film censorship in the Horthy era as complexly as possible, and as a part of this it places big emphasis on involving the political-social-cultural context in the analysis.

The film historiography focusing on Hungarian motion pictures from before 1945 has studied film censorship and the *Országos Mozgóképvizsgáló Bizottság (OMB)* [National Motion Picture Examination Board] only slightly so far. The works examining this field and the institutional network of the period were representations which primarily relied on the press, professional publications, visual contents and later memoirs. The study of official documents and sources found in the archives were not usually dominant in these works. The examination of the above-mentioned texts (especially the documents of *Országos Mozgóképvizsgáló Bizottság (OMB)* [National Motion Picture Examination Board])¹ adds new information and aspects that significantly enrich our previous knowledge on this subject. The dissertation relies strongly on these institutional sources and with the help of these resources aims to examine certain characteristics of the relationship between power and motion picture through the example of the Hungarian film institutional network of the Horthy era.

The examination is based on the supposition that the institutional network constituted of various subsystems (production, distribution, projection, censorship, representation of interests, press), which were interrelated and had an impact each other's workings. This institutional network has features which are typical to the whole system and are also demonstrable in the working of all the subsystems (system-specific features) and also has unique elements that specific to the subsystems. Consequently, both the system-specific features of film institutional network and the unique features of singular subsystems are demonstrable in the working of the singular subsystems including film censorship. The *Országos Mozgóképvizsgáló Bizottság (OMB)* [National Motion Picture Examination Board] was a significant participant of the Hungarian film institutional network in Horthy era, because its activity covered not only the post-production control of motion pictures, but also it had functions that connected it to other subsystems (film production, projection etc.) of the motion

¹ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltár (MNL OL) [National Archives of Hungary]: K 158 (Elnöki iratok), K 159 (Általános iratok)

picture. It worked as an institution that formed an interface (A) between the state power and the members of the motion picture profession, (B) among the participants of the state power and (C) among the members of the motion picture profession. As a consequence, it is especially suitable for studying the relationship between power and the motion picture milieu.

The decision making of the *Országos Mozgóképvizsgáló Bizottság (OMB)* [National Motion Picture Examination Board] was based on aspects that were determined by legal regulations. The Horthy era saw a change in both the aspects (frames) and in the interpretations of their contents. On the one hand, there were elements that regularly appeared in the interpretation, on the other hand there were elements the presence of which was determined by the interests of the ruling power. The so-called Christian-national discourse that was dominant after 1919 can be interpreted as a system of various discourses. The dissertation describes some of these discourses using the documents formulated in accordance with the decisions of the OMB and it states that by the regulation of the discourses for motion pictures film censorship generated a censorship milieu that was not favourable to the appearance and spread of some elements (narratives, motifs), which is connected to the genre features of Hungarian motion pictures produced in the Horthy era.

The dissertation examines the discourses that appear in the resolutions of the *Országos Mozgóképvizsgáló Bizottság (OMB)* [National Motion Picture Examination Board] as information carriers but to do so the description and characterization of the context is essential. Because the research of film history has neglected the more detailed examination of the history of film institutional network and censorship of the Horthy era, especially the OMB and its documents, this basic research is carried out within the framework of this dissertation. This is one of the reasons why this thesis devotes so much attention to the demonstration of political-institutional context, and why the discourse analysis follows only in the later part of the text.

II. Theoretical frames

The international censorship research went through significant change in the last decades. Several works demonstrate this historiographic shift on which the scientific literature reflected as well.² The *New Censorship Theory* is not a concrete theory that can be traced back to a concrete scientific text, but rather an approach that feeds on different sources. This explains why there are different approaches within the New Censorship Theory and whose results complement each other.

Those who study the relation of the power and discourses base their works on Michel Foucault's writings. Those who examine the sociological-functionalist aspect of the censorship rely on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Those who link censorship with the reproduction of social relations use Louis Althusser and the apparatus theory as their starting point. Those who

² Müller, Beate: Censorship and Cultural Regulation: Mapping the Territory. In: Müller, Beate (ed.): *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. pp. 1–32.; Freshwater, Helen: Towards a Redefinition of Censorship. In: Müller, Beate (ed.): *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. pp. 225–245.; Müller, Beate: Zensurforschung: Paradigmen, Konzepte, Theorien. In: Rautenberg, Ursula (ed.): *Buchwissenschaft in Deutschland. Ein Handbuch*. Berlin – New York: De Gruyter Saur, 2010. pp. 321–360.; Bunn, Matthew: Reimagining Repression: New Censorship Theory and After. *History and Theory* (2015) no. 1. pp. 25–44.

approach the problem from the psychoanalytical direction base their work particularly on Judith Butler's ideas.

From a theoretical point of view this research builds primarily on Michel Foucault's oeuvre³ because one of the aims of this text is to reveal the relationship between power, film censorship and the various discourses in the Horthy era. The notion of discourse and power has a central position in Michel Foucault's theory, but his interpretation of these concepts has changed to a certain extent. The base of Foucault's power interpretation is that power is not restricted to the institutional network and the possession of positions, but it oversteps their frames. Power interweaves closely with the different discourses, because the two notions suppose each other mutually – the power is directed towards the appropriation of the discourse, because the former can only exist by the latter. According to Foucault's interpretation power is not only oppressive but also constructive at the same time as the prohibitions and regulations help the creation of certain elements. A further relevant realization of Foucault is that thanks to the power techniques (the interpretation of Bentham's Panopticon concept in the *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*⁴) the consciousness of the control infiltrates the thinking and the behaviour of people which makes the operation of power easier. While Foucault's works written in the 1960s (particularly *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969) focused around a discourse that was subordinate to nothing because according to his then proposition only other discourses could form a certain discourse, his works written in the 1970s (1975. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*; 1976. *The History of Sexuality – Vol. I: The Will to Knowledge*) forefront the notion of power. As a result the description of the relationship between power and discourse changed: a coordinated relation took the place of the earlier subordinated relation, which supposes that the two notions affect each other mutually. (Later in the 1980s the problem of the subject, turning into subject became prominent in the oeuvre.)⁵

In his 1970 lecture / text titled *The Order of Discourse*⁶ Michel Foucault studied the main types of procedures that limit and rarefy the discourses. Foucault divided these into three fundamental groups: the procedures of exclusion (the prohibition, the opposition between reason and madness, the opposition between true and false), internal procedures (the commentary, the author and the discipline) and the determining of the conditions of the application (the ritual, the society of discourse, the doctrine and the social appropriation of discourses). This dissertation presents examples of the period manifestations of the described procedures during the analysis of the film censorship in the Horthy era. Although the dissertation discusses the relation between power and discourses in the Horthy era, but it does

³ Sutyák Tibor: *Michel Foucault gondolkodása*. Máriabesnyő – Gödöllő: Attraktor Kiadó, 2007.; Olay Csaba – Ullmann Tamás: *Kontinentális filozófia a XX. században*. Budapest: L' Harmattan Kiadó, 2011. pp. 373–393.; Szabó Márton: *Politikai tudáselméletek: Szemantikai, szimbolikus, retorikai és kommunikatív-diszkurzív értelmezések a politikáról*. Budapest: Universitas – Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó Rt., 1998. pp. 209–237.

⁴ Foucault, Michel: *Felügyelet és büntetés: A börtön története*. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1990. (trans. Fázsy Anikó, Csűrös Klára) / Foucault, Michel: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon, 1977. (trans. Alan Sheridan)

⁵ Kiss Balázs: Michel Foucault hatalomfelfogásáról. *Politikatudományi Szemle* (1994) no. 1. pp. 43–68.

⁶ Foucault, Michel: A diskurzus rendje. *Holmi* (1991) no. 7. pp. 868–889. (trans. Török Gábor) / Foucault, Michel: *The Order of Discourse*. In: Robert Young (ed.): *Untying the Text: a Post-Structuralist Reader*. Boston – London – Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. pp. 51–78.

not aim to describe all the components of the era's discourse network ('*diskurzus*szövevény'⁷). The aim of the research is to work the documents of *Országos Mozgóképvizsgáló Bizottság (OMB)* [National Motion Picture Examination Board] up and to demonstrate and to analyse through some selected examples (respect, religion, sexuality etc.) how the film censorship as an institution of power treated the discourses in the Horthy era. The thesis deals exclusively with the censorship's textual evaluations written about the motion pictures and the documents of the censorship dossiers as carriers and does not analyse the motion pictures themselves. The research treats all motion pictures or rather censorship evaluations that belong to those alike, because the demonstration of the discourses that were carried by those will be primary, for this reason the evaluations of newsreels, commercials or other motion pictures will equally be discussed besides those of feature films.

The dissertation formulates the statement that film censorship generated a censorship milieu with the regulation of the discourses for the motion pictures, that was not favourable to the appearance and spread of some elements, and this is connected to the genre features of Hungarian motion pictures produced in the Horthy era. To accomplish this aim the text applies a version of the genre theory's approach that redefines the notion of genre based on the works of Foucault. Based on the ideas of the French philosopher and on the theoretical works of Andrew Tudor, Steve Neale and Rick Altman Jason Mittell states that he views genre as a cultural category that is a cluster of different discursive practices. Mittell distinguishes three basic types of discourses (defining discourses, interpreting discourses, evaluating discourses) among the discourses that were placed in the front by the critics, the public or the film industry and are linked to the genres.⁸ As this approach emphasizes the relation between the genres and the discourses, it enables the formulation of questions vital to this thesis. Do the parts found in the documents of the OMB, particularly in the motion pictures' censorship resolutions, serve as carriers that *directly* define, interpret or evaluate the different genres or the elements (motifs, themes, narratives etc.) that can be related to the different period versions of certain genres are found in these carriers? In the latter case from the elements *we can conclude* some genres or rather the features of genres and so the research, although it does not aim to cover the whole genre system, does not ignore the examinations that study the genre history of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, the forms of the international appearance of some genres and the potential comparison patterns of the Hungarian popular film either.

III. Aims and results

The train of thought of the dissertation can be summarised that the text gets from description of the wider context to the study of a narrower problem. First the historiographical representation of motion pictures institutional network in Horthy era and especially the period censorship is demonstrated. This chapter aims to show what further possibilities are hidden in the archival material that has been worked up new. This is followed by a brief description of

⁷ Szabó: *Politikai tudáselméletek: Szemantikai, szimbolikus, retorikai és kommunikatív-diszkurzív értelmezések a politikáról*. p. 211.

⁸ Mittell, Jason: *Genre and Television. From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York – London: Routledge, 2004. pp. 1–28.

the motion picture institutional network, or rather its subsystems (production, distribution, projection, representation of interests, press), in Horthy era so that the text demonstrates the position of the film censorship within the motion pictures milieu and its relation to the other subsystems. The detailed description of the film censorship's subsystem covers the analysis of the legal frames, the study of composition of the examination board and the demonstration of the system's operation. Through these the text gets to problem of examining the discourses that appear in the resolutions of the *Országos Mozgóképvizsgáló Bizottság (OMB)* [National Motion Picture Examination Board] as carriers.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to give examples for the manifestations of the discourse control procedures in the Horthy era (the procedures of exclusion, internal procedures and the determining of the conditions of the application) as distinguished by Michel Foucault.

The other aim of the dissertation is to examine if there are certain parts in the documents of the OMB, particularly in the motion pictures' censorship resolutions, as carriers that *directly* define, interpret or evaluate the different genres, or whether the elements that can be related to the different period versions of certain genres are found in these carriers.

Through the realization of these aims the dissertation argues that film censorship generated a censorship milieu with the regulation of the discourses for the motion pictures that was not favourable to the appearance and spread of some elements (motifs, themes, narratives etc.) and this is connected to the genre features of Hungarian motion pictures produced in the Horthy era.